

Rollins College Rollins Scholarship Online

Honors Program Theses

Spring 2019

“LIQUID SUNSHINE, or SOMETHING ELSE,” a play by Kalli Anne Joslin

Kalli Joslin
[kj Joslin@rollins.edu](mailto:kjoslin@rollins.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Joslin, Kalli, ““LIQUID SUNSHINE, or SOMETHING ELSE,” a play by Kalli Anne Joslin” (2019). *Honors Program Theses*. 89.
<https://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors/89>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Rollins Scholarship Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of Rollins Scholarship Online. For more information, please contact rwalton@rollins.edu.

LIQUID SUNSHINE, or SOMETHING ELSE

A play by Kalli Anne Joslin

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

MARTHA, Bahamian female, 19, domestic worker, optimistic and determined

ISAAC, Bahamian male, 23, construction worker, frustrated but reserved, MARTHA's husband

ELENA, Eastern European female, 28-35, fleeing persecution with her children, thoughtful and protective

JOSEPH and ANNA, Eastern European, 4 and 7, ELENA's children

ROSITA, half-Cuban half-African American female, 28-35, owner of a popular coffee shop, stubborn but compassionate

MARTIN, half-Cuban half-African American male, 30s, lector and radical journalist, fiery and philosophical, ROSITA's uncle

MYRTLE, white female, 28-35, a beauty specialist turned real estate agent, chatty and assertive

An ENSEMBLE consisting of at least 8 men, who play the FERRYMAN, STATE OFFICERS, FEDERAL AGENTS, CAFÉ PATRONS, and MILKMAN

SETTING

Florida, 1927

NOTES

A // notation indicates that the next line of dialogue should begin, overlapping the end of the previous line.

Lines of ensemble dialogue, especially among the café patrons, can be redistributed at the director's discretion.

ACT ONE

prologue

A dark stage. Slowly, the sounds of lapping waves and soft murmuring emerge. A moment later, a lantern light flickers to life, illuminating the faces of ISAAC, MARTHA, and FERRYMAN mid-argument. Beyond them, many other faces are shrouded in the darkness.

FERRYMAN

If you don't pay, you're not getting off this boat.

MARTHA

I told you, we already paid that man on the docks!

ISAAC

One-hundred seventy-five each. That's what we were told.

FERRYMAN

Well, I don't look like the man on the docks, do I? This is my boat, and you're paying me or you're going back to Nassau.

MARTHA

We don't have any money left. We gave him everything we had.

Beat. FERRYMAN doesn't budge.

MARTHA (cont.)

Sir, please understand. We left because there was no money at home. Everything's dying. We're just trying to make a living.

FERRYMAN

So am I, lady. But, if you don't have the money, I can think of another way you could pay. . .

ISAAC

Watch it.

FERRYMAN

Careful, now. You wouldn't want to end up overboard. *(Beat.)*
I'll give you two some time to think about my offer.

MARTHA grits her teeth as FERRYMAN leaves, taking the light with him. From the dark, a child's voice:

ANNA

Mama, I'm cold.

ELENA

Shh. We'll be there soon. Florida is warm and the sun shines there, you'll see.

JOSEPH

But I can't see anything right now.

ANNA

Tell us the Florida story again. Tell us about the beaches.

ELENA

You've never seen anything like them. They sparkle in the sunlight like the finest jewel. The seashells are as big as your heart. The—

FERRYMAN's lantern illuminates ELENA and her two children, tucked among several unlabeled crates and threadbare blankets. Instinctively, ELENA shields them, even as they strain to get a better look at FERRYMAN.

FERRYMAN

Get up. We're almost there.

They stand and huddle closer. ELENA stumbles, lightheaded, but JOSEPH and ANNA brace her.

ELENA (weakly)

What happens when we arrive?

FERRYMAN

There'll be a man on the shore with a green light and a wagon. Carry the boxes to him. If he finds out you stole anything, he'll kill you.

ELENA

We— we don't even know what's in the boxes, sir.

FERRYMAN

The only thing more illegal than you.

ANNA

A person can't be illegal, sir. Mama told me that.

ELENA gently shushes ANNA.

FERRYMAN

Yeah? Tell that to the Americans. Where are you from, anyways?

ANNA

Warsaw! I mean. . . London, sir.

FERRYMAN

Huh. You should practice that for the next time someone asks.

FERRYMAN throws ELENA a rope.

FERRYMAN (cont.)

When we get close enough, jump out of the boat and pull her in. You've gotta move fast.

ELENA

Yes, sir. Do you have anything to eat? My children, they're-

FERRYMAN

Listen, I'm doing you enough of a favor as it is. Do you have the money?

She pulls a wad of bills out of her pocket and hands them to him. He counts the money, then hands her a folded piece of paper.

FERRYMAN (cont.)

Find the man that owns this restaurant. He's an old friend of mine. He doesn't know I'm doing this, but if he's still there, he'll let you stay for a time.

ELENA

Yes, sir.

FERRYMAN (*not unkindly*)

Come up top. It'll be any minute now.

ELENA and the children follow FERRYMAN's lantern away from the boxes. The light on stage grows incrementally brighter as early morning fog rolls in. JOSEPH dashes over to the edge and points into the darkness.

JOSEPH

Mama, look, a boat! I see another boat!

ELENA

Quiet, Joseph. We're the only ones out here.

Murmurs rise from the other passengers. They notice an upturned schooner, its contents lost to the waves.

ISAAC (whispering)

Is that a body?

MARTHA

Dear God.

ISAAC

Is anyone alive? (Louder.) Hello?

FERRYMAN

Shh. You can't help them. Just be glad it's not you. Yet. (Beat. He steps toward MARTHA.) Now, have you—

A green light begins to softly glow, burning through the fog. FERRYMAN turns away from MARTHA, annoyed. She sighs in relief.

FERRYMAN (cont.)

There he is. (To MARTHA.) Stay put. I'm not done with you.

He firmly grabs her butt before walking away, toward the front of the boat. MARTHA grips ISAAC's arm tightly. A long beat, as everyone watches the green light grow brighter. Softly, the beginning of a romantic Florida ballad sings through the air. FERRYMAN puts out his lantern.

FERRYMAN (cont.)

Alright, it's time. Everyone, take a rope. Pull her in. Don't make a sound.

ANNA

Mama, let me help. You're—

ELENA

No, Anna. Stay here. I'll be right back.

ISAAC, MARTHA, and ELENA exit the boat and slowly pull it to shore as the ballad grows louder. Once ashore, ELENA climbs back in and begins moving crates with the children. ISAAC and MARTHA hesitate for a moment, and then attempt to make a run for it.

FERRYMAN

Hey! You whore! Get back here!

The music suddenly transitions to sirens, and two plainly-clothed STATE OFFICERS run onto the stage.

OFFICER 1

STOP!

Everyone scatters. ISAAC and MARTHA escape off-stage. ELENA distracts the OFFICERS as her children run off. In a panic, FERRYMAN grabs ELENA's arms and holds them behind her back.

FERRYMAN (*jovially*)

Officers, officers. How good to see you this lovely morning! I was just out on my routine fishing trip, and I found this *Polish* stowaway in my cargo deck. I brought her to shore to turn her in to you.

OFFICER 2

How valiant of you. Where are the others that were on this ship?

FERRYMAN

Why, it was just me, sir. Me and this polack. Now, I hear there may be a reward in order. . .

*FERRYMAN pushes ELENA forward, closer to
the OFFICERS.*

OFFICER 1

We heard voices. A child's.

ELENA

There were no children here. Just— just me, sir. My name is. . .
I have papers. I'm from London.

OFFICER 2

Yeah, and I'm from China. Arrest them both.

FERRYMAN

But sir! I—

OFFICER 1

We're going to inspect your boat. If we don't find any
contraband, we might be inclined to believe your story. If we do
find something. . .

*Two PROHIBITION AGENTS arrive out-of-
breath, wearing stiff suits and waving
federal badges.*

AGENT 1

Stop! United States Federal Government, Bureau of Prohibition!

OFFICER 2

(Under his breath.) Shit. *(Loudly.)* We have it handled, agents.
This is a Florida State matter.

AGENT 2

Not if that boat came in from outside the country it isn't.

AGENT 1

Especially not if it's carrying liquor. That's a federal
offense.

OFFICER 1

We have it covered.

AGENT 2

Not anymore. Hand them over.

4/21/19

Reluctantly, OFFICER 1 and OFFICER 2 step back. Sensing their chance, FERRYMAN and ELENA slip out of their grasp and run in separate directions.

AGENT 1

Stop them!

The OFFICERS make half-hearted attempts to catch them, but ELENA and FERRYMAN are long gone.

OFFICER 1

Sorry, guys. I thought you had it covered now.

scene 1

Lights up to reveal "The Sun Shoppe," an unassuming Cuban restaurant. The tables are full with working-class men, some black and some white-passing, sipping coffee or smoking cigars and speaking softly. A board on the back wall displays the entire menu in Spanish, and faded posters hang on the walls in-between potted flowers. Two doorways in the back lead to a stairway up and a kitchen off-stage.

ROSITA, wearing a floral apron, comes out from behind the counter with two cups of coffee and walks through the front door. She hands one of the cups to MARTIN, who is leaning against the wall uncomfortably.

ROSITA

Uncle.

MARTIN

Thank you, Rosita.

They sip their coffee for a moment in silence. MARTIN smiles softly.

ROSITA

Are you going to tell me why you're here?

MARTIN

Patience, Rosie. This is the best coffee in town.

ROSITA

I know. I've got ten customers in there paying for it.

MARTIN huffs.

MARTIN

I wanted to make sure you're safe. Things are getting worse. And you're all alone now.

ROSITA

That's not news. I'm fine.

MARTIN

The police aren't as forgiving as they used to be. They wouldn't like you serving gringos.

ROSITA

As if the police were forgiving to me before? *(Beat.)* And those "gringos" are as Cuban as you are. You'd do well to remember that.

MARTIN

And you'd do well to cover your own ass. I'm telling you. I've seen it happen. Everyone in the factory is talking about it. They'll show up at your door, say they're there to look for liquor, and next thing you know you've got bullet holes in your wall and no more customers. If you're lucky.

ROSITA

There's no liquor here.

MARTIN

There doesn't need to be. If they're in the mood for trouble, they'll make up anything. You know that.

Two STATE OFFICERS walk by the front of the café, swinging their batons. One of them stops to spit on the ground, then leers at ROSITA for a moment before the other pulls him away. ROSITA and MARTIN look down for the entire exchange, avoiding their gazes. A long beat.

ROSITA *(quietly)*

Is that the only reason you came?

MARTIN

Am I not allowed to visit my niece anymore?

ROSITA

You never visit me. // Except when. . .

MARTIN

Yes, well. . .

ROSITA

Look, if you're just here to tell me it's "time to get married," don't.

MARTIN

I just want what's best for you. He's not coming back, Rosie. He wasn't good for you in the first place.

ROSITA

Aren't the boys at the factory missing you right about now? Careful, if you leave them without a lector for too long, they'll riot.

MARTIN

If I'm doing my job right, they just might. Soon. The cigar industry is suffocating at the white man's hand.

ROSITA

I thought you were telling me to be safe. Who are you to be picking these fights?

MARTIN steps forward in anger, before restraining himself. MARTHA, now wearing a plain apron over her boat clothes, rushes out to ROSITA, whispering excitedly.

MARTHA

Ma'am, the cake is done. I took it out of the oven. Are we going to frost it?

ROSITA

I don't think we have any frosting. Put some extra sugar on top, though. Is everything else ready?

MARTHA

I believe so, ma'am.

ROSITA

Great. *(To MARTIN, gesturing at his coffee.)* Are you done with that?

MARTIN

Not yet. I just got here.

ROSITA

Well, take your last sip. I have work to do, and so do you.

MARTIN

Aren't you at least going to invite me inside for cake?

Beat.

ROSITA

Alright. But no theatrics. I don't need my customers rioting against me.

MARTHA, ROSITA, and MARTIN enter the cafe. ROSITA and MARTHA go back into the kitchen, emerging a moment later with a large cake on a platter topped with powdered sugar and an assortment of birthday candles. The café erupts with cheers as she sets it at a table of older patrons.

ROSITA

Feliz cumpleaños. Happy 50th.

MAN 1

Thank you, Rosie. I can't believe you remembered.

ROSITA

Have I ever forgotten?

MAN 2

Oh, hurry up and blow them out already. I'm hungry!

MAN 1 blows the candles out, and ROSITA begins to cut the cake into generous slices that MARTHA distributes. ROSITA brings the last slice to MARTIN, and they stand beside the counter to eat.

MARTIN

You take good care of these men, Rosie.

ROSITA

These men keep my lights on. They deserve to be celebrated every now and then.

MAN 1

Rosie, you've got to give this recipe to my wife.

MAN 2

You should be my wife. Rosie, your talents are wasted here.

ROSITA

If you think my talents are "wasted" here, I'll close my doors now. You can go somewhere else for your lunch breaks.

The patrons immediately respond with "no"s and "we love you"s. ROSITA smiles and looks at MARTIN, who laughs. They all return to cheerful conversation. Beat.

MYRTLE, a wide-eyed blonde in high-heeled shoes, appears outside. The moment she steps through the door, all conversation stops. ROSITA stands straighter, and MARTIN takes a step back.

ROSITA

Hello, ma'am. How. . . may I help you?

MARTIN shoots a look at ROSITA, and forcefully sets his plate down.

MARTIN

You'll have to excuse me, Rosita. I'll see you soon. (*Under his breath.*) I'm warning you.

MARTIN slides past MYRTLE, nodding stiffly in her direction, and exits. MYRTLE takes a moment to look around the restaurant, making cautious eye contact with the white-passing patrons, and finally smiles at ROSITA.

MYRTLE

Oh, hello there! This is such a *charming* restaurant. There aren't really a lot of ethnic cafés in this neighborhood, you know.

MAN 2 (*under his breath*)

Not anymore.

Beat.

MYRTLE

Say, do you happen to know where the owner is?

ROSITA

He's. . . not here right now. I run things while he's gone, though. My name is Rosita, Rosita—

MYRTLE

Oh my. A girl like you, running a place like this? And who's that cute little doll behind you?

She gestures at MARTHA.

ROSITA

Oh. She's new.

MARTHA

Martha, ma'am.

MYRTLE

Rosita and Martha. Well, I'm Myrtle. Myrtle J. English, real estate agent.

MYRTLE takes a step forward, as if to shake ROSITA's hand, but stops herself. An awkward beat.

MYRTLE

Well, when your owner gets back, I'd love to talk with him about this location. It's got a lot of promise.

ROSITA

What does it "promise?" It's already a café.

MYRTLE

Oh, but you're so close to the beach, and there's that brilliant new resort going up across the street! You know, my husband, Carl, he's actually putting together a show for when they open.

MAN 2

What kind of show, eh?

MYRTLE turns, and for the first time seems to notice all of the café patrons staring at her.

MYRTLE

Well, it's. . . you know, a spectacle. A spectacular! Dancing, and fountains, and. . .

MARTHA

Oh! My husband is helping to build those fountains. // He's—

ROSITA (*softly*)

Martha, you shouldn't speak unless spoken to.

MYRTLE (*oblivious*)

Maybe our husbands have met. Say, you should audition for that show! You're just the type!

MARTHA

Oh, I don't // really. . .

MYRTLE

It's paid, you know.

ROSITA

She already has a job here. (*Beat.*) Ma'am.

MYRTLE

Oh, well. . . (*Beat.*) You know, I feel like I'm interrupting something. I should probably get going. But please, let me know when your owner gets back, I'd love to talk to him about this property. I think it could really be something else! Here, I'll leave you the name of our office, the operator knows us by heart.

She takes out a pen and paper from her purse and writes down her information. She hands it to ROSITA.

MYRTLE (*cont.*)

Oh, and if you don't have a telephone, you can usually find me right across the street visiting Carl around lunchtime! Now, before I go, could I trouble you for some of that ah-mazing-smelling coffee to take with me?

ROSITA nods, and MARTHA pours one into a ceramic mug. She hands it across the counter to MYRTLE.

MYRTLE (*cont.*)

I'll bring this mug back the next time I come. Now that Carl's working so much, I'll probably be in here all the time!

MYRTLE squints at the menu board, and then realizes she can't read a single word. She clutches her purse a bit tighter.

MYRTLE (cont.)

Now, um, how much do I owe you. . .?

ROSITA

Please. It's on me.

MYRTLE

Oh, you are just the absolute sweetest. I guess I'll just have to pay you double next time, then. Alright, ta-ta!

MYRTLE exits, and the entire café holds its breath for a beat. Then, a collective sigh.

MAN 2

What was *that*?

MAN 1

Is she going to come back?

MAN 2

Is she seriously trying to buy the place?

MAN 1

Rosie, please don't sell, this is the only good coffee within five miles anymore.

MAN 2

It's true, I can't get to anywhere else on my lunch.

MAN 1

And who else is going to make me cakes like this?

ROSITA

I'm not selling to anyone, calm down. And don't stare so much next time.

MARTHA

Is there really going to be a next time? Your uncle, he seemed to think we shouldn't serve—

ROSITA

Who I serve is up to me and only me. Besides, we'd get in much more trouble if we refused her service, don't you think? *(Beat.)* And you shouldn't be eavesdropping on my conversations. I-

ROSITA takes a deep breath, and everyone looks expectantly at her. She pauses, wipes her hands on her apron, and walks behind the counter.

ROSITA (cont.)

Alright, that's enough. If I remember correctly, we're supposed to be celebrating a birthday. Eat your cake.

She begins wiping down the counter as the café returns to normal.

scene 2

Early morning. The sun is just barely over the horizon, and the café is still mostly dark. All of the chairs are up on tables except for one, which ISAAC sits in, picking at a bit of food. MARTHA is sweeping the floor around him.

ISAAC

Their deadlines are completely unrealistic. They expect all those fountains, plus the swimming pools, plus the guest rooms, all to be done in two months, meanwhile it's getting hotter by the day. They don't have nearly enough workers. They practically picked me up off the street last week, as soon as we got here. And I know if it doesn't get done in time we're going to be to blame, and we won't get paid. I thought they outlawed slavery in this // country.

MARTHA

Isaac, please. You spend so many hours of the day working. Let's not spend your free moments talking about it as well.

ISAAC

You're right. I'm sorry.

MARTHA crosses over and kisses him on the forehead.

MARTHA

I love you.

ISAAC

I love you, too.

MARTHA

Did you get enough to eat? I don't know if I'll be able to run you lunch today, yesterday I barely got a break to use the restroom.

ISAAC

You know, at least she lets you use her restroom.

Beat.

MARTHA

Do you know the names of your supervisors over there?

ISAAC

Most of them. They're all pigs. Why?

MARTHA

Is one of them named Carl? Carl // English?

ISAAC

Yeah, he's the worst one. How do you know him?

MARTHA

His wife came in here yesterday.

ISAAC

Oh, I've seen her. Myrtle, right? Golden hair, ridiculous shoes?
She came *here*?

MARTHA

That's her. (*Beat.*) I heard he's putting together a show, for
the opening.

ISAAC

Yeah, he's the main one cracking the whip to get this project
done on time. He says he's bringing in some "big talent," so it
has to happen that day or else.

MARTHA

Myrtle said I should audition for the // show.

ISAAC

No.

MARTHA

You didn't let me finish.

ISAAC

I don't want you anywhere near that man. Or that woman.

MARTHA

We could use the extra money.

ISAAC

It's not worth it. You're already working here, and you do
laundry for an entire street. You do enough.

MARTHA

I want us to live in a real house. I want us to have a child someday.

ISAAC

You can't actually want to bring a kid into this world.

MARTHA

Isaac.

ISAAC

Look at how difficult our lives are. We wouldn't even have time to care for it.

MARTHA

It won't always be like this. We're still new here. We're still getting adjusted.

ISAAC

It's never going to be easy for us here, you know that.

MARTHA

It's not supposed to be easy. *(Beat.)* And it's better than back home.

ISAAC *(sadly)*

Yeah. *(Beat.)* I miss home.

MARTHA

Me too. Remember when we used to dance, all night long?

MARTHA puts down her broom and walks over to ISAAC, taking his hands and pulling him to his feet. She swings her hands up dramatically and dances around him. After a moment, he smiles.

ISAAC

I could never keep my eyes off you.

She twirls into him, and he holds her close. They sway for a moment. Eventually, a creak comes from the upstairs floorboards.

MARTHA *(sadly)*

You should go before she comes downstairs. But let's write to your family soon, tell them we're doing well. I'm sure they miss us, too.

ISAAC

Yeah.

ISAAC kisses her on the forehead and moves toward the door.

MARTHA

It will get better for us. I promise.

ISAAC nods and opens the door as ROSITA comes down the stairs, wrapped in a robe.

ROSITA

You're here early.

MARTHA

Yes, ma'am.

ROSITA

We're not open for another half an hour at least.

MARTHA

Miss Rosita, this is my husband, Isaac.

ROSITA

Pleased to meet you. *(Gently.)* Martha, we're not open yet.

ISAAC

I understand, ma'am. I'm sorry. I'll be // going.

MARTHA

We walked over together this morning. He has an early shift at the resort site, and I didn't want to walk here alone. It's my fault. I'm sorry.

ROSITA walks behind the counter and begins brewing coffee.

ROSITA

I understand. Isaac, would you like some coffee before you go?

*ISAAC looks to MARTHA for permission.
MARTHA shrugs.*

ISAAC
That would be very nice. Thank you.

ROSITA
Of course.

*She pours three coffees and passes two over
the counter toward MARTHA and ISAAC. ISAAC
closes the door and comes back inside.
ROSITA takes down two other chairs, and
they sit. ISAAC takes a sip.*

ISAAC
This is really good.

ROSITA
It's café con leche. My dad taught me how to make it, when we
still lived in Havana.

MARTHA
How long have you lived here?

ROSITA
Since I was sixteen. I came over for work.

ISAAC
And you opened a café, just like that?

ROSITA laughs.

ROSITA
No. I did laundry for a time. I was a nanny. That was when I met
Manuel. . . (Beat.) This is his shop.

ISAAC
Are you together?

Beat.

ROSITA
Not anymore. He's been gone for a while. I took over the
restaurant once he left.

MARTHA

He left you?

ROSITA

It's not really your business, Martha.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, ma'am.

An awkward beat.

ROSITA

You two need to be very. . . careful around here. Don't upset anyone. This neighborhood, all this construction. . . soon, I feel like there won't be any of us left in the city. I can hardly afford the rent these days, and I know it'll only go up more once that resort's done.

MARTHA

Ma'am? Are you—

ROSITA (*mostly to herself*)

Maybe I should just sell the place to that woman, get it over with.

ISAAC

Is it really yours to sell? I mean, if this Manuel—

*A tense beat. ISAAC looks out the window.
It's almost daylight.*

ISAAC (*cont.*)

You know, I should head over to the site. I think they're keeping us sunup to sundown again today.

ROSITA sighs.

ROSITA

I'll send Martha with a sandwich around eleven. (*To MARTHA.*) But you'll need to hurry back, I can't handle the lunch rush alone these days.

MARTHA

Thank you, ma'am. That's very kind.

ROSITA nods and stands, pulling her robe tighter.

ROSITA

I need to change my clothes. Martha, go ahead and finish opening up the shop. We'll have the other men stopping in for their coffee any minute.

ROSITA heads upstairs. ISAAC and MARTHA kiss briefly, and then ISAAC leaves. MARTHA clears their cups and begins taking down the rest of the chairs, swaying slightly. She hums the ballad from the Prologue quietly to herself.

Outside, ELENA, JOSEPH, and ANNA appear, their clothes ragged. ELENA looks down at the piece of paper in her hand, and then up at the café.

ELENA

Stay here.

ELENA peers into the window, and sees MARTHA. MARTHA turns around a moment later and barely stifles a scream. She picks up the broom, takes a deep breath, and opens the door.

MARTHA

Excuse me, ma'am. We're not open yet.

The children just stare at MARTHA. MARTHA smiles at them briefly.

ELENA

I am looking for the owner. Manuel?

MARTHA

Oh. He's. . . not here.

ELENA

I am a friend of a friend.

ANNA

It smells good in there. Can we eat?

JOSEPH

I'm hungry.

MARTHA

I— I'm sorry. I don't think I can help you.

Beat. ELENA crumples up the piece of paper, then looks closely at MARTHA.

ELENA

You. . . you were on the boat with me. I remember.

MARTHA grips her broom tighter.

MARTHA

I don't know what you're talking about.

ELENA

You were there. The police. You ran away.

MARTHA

I didn't— I would never run from the police. I haven't broken any laws.

ELENA

Please help me. My children. We don't know anyone here. The man on the boat, he said Manuel would help us, give us shelter.

MARTHA

I wouldn't trust a word that man told you.

MARTHA stops and looks toward the stairs. A long, painful beat.

MARTHA (cont.)

Okay. Come in. You can't stay long though. My boss will be down soon.

ELENA and her children quickly shuffle into the café. MARTHA closes the door.

ELENA

Does he know Manuel? Will he help us?

MARTHA

She did. I don't know.

ROSITA (*off-stage*)

Martha, are we open yet?

MARTHA

Not yet, ma'am. I was talking to myself. (*Beat. Quietly, to ELENA.*) Go into the kitchen. On the bottom shelf in the back, there is half a loaf of bread I was saving. You can eat that. But be very quiet. It's not safe around here.

The children run into the kitchen. ELENA grabs MARTHA's hand.

ELENA

Thank you. . . ?

MARTHA

Martha.

ELENA

Thank you, Martha. My name is Elena. My children, they are—

ROSITA starts to come down the stairs.

MARTHA

Don't worry about it. Go.

ELENA follows her children into the kitchen, just as ROSITA enters. MARTHA stands behind the counter and smiles.

ROSITA

Has the delivery man come yet? I think we're almost out of milk.

MARTHA

Not yet, ma'am.

ROSITA

Great. Well, I'm going to go put the bread in the oven.

ROSITA takes a step toward the kitchen, but MARTHA quickly blocks her.

MARTHA

I can do it. It's no problem.

ROSITA hesitates, then shrugs.

ROSITA

Okay, then.

*MARTHA gestures to a nearby chair without
leaving the counter.*

MARTHA

Why don't you just. . . relax. It's going to be a long day.

scene 3

The same day, close to closing. MARTIN and a few patrons linger at one of the tables smoking cigars. MARTHA is obsessively scrubbing the counter while one of the patrons gives ROSITA a shoulder massage.

MARTIN

Fifty cents an hour, fifty hours a week?

MAN 2

Yup.

MARTIN

So, five dollars a day?

MAN 1

Give or take.

MARTIN

You're getting robbed. Some of the white men are making almost double that, and they're not getting worked to the bone.

MAN 2

What else is new?

MAN 1

At least we have jobs, right? What are your factory boys making?

MARTIN grunts.

MARTIN

Even less, these days. *(Beat.)* Maybe I should switch careers.

MAN 2

You think you're cut out for construction? Don't you just sit there and read books all day?

MARTIN *(defensively)*

I inspire the men! I read *El Separatista*, I read the *Negro World*. Some of those men can't read at all, I'm their only source for news. I—

MAN 1

It's alright, Martin, he's just pulling your leg. Lectors are important, everyone knows that.

MAN 2

Honestly, I wish we were allowed to have someone like you at the site. Not that we'd be able to hear you over all the noise.

MARTIN *(tentatively)*

Well, I could read to you here. . . during lunch some days. . .

ROSITA *(without opening her eyes)*

No.

MAN 1

Aw, why not?

MAN 2

It's not like it would hurt anybody.

MAN 1

It would be nice, I think.

ROSITA

Uncle, I don't understand you. In one breath, you say "be careful, don't upset anybody" and in the next, you volunteer to read the same things here that are supposedly inspiring your boys to riot. Why would I allow that?

MARTIN

They're just words, Rosie.

ROSITA

They're never just words.

A long beat.

MAN 2

Hey, Martha!

MARTHA *(distracted)*

Huh. . . yes?

MAN 2

What's Rosie paying you? Are you getting robbed too?

ROSITA

Cut it out.

MARTHA
Miss Rosita is. . . very kind to me.

MAN 2
I bet I could be even nicer, eh?

MAN 2 pats his lap, as if to ask MARTHA to sit. ROSITA finally opens her eyes and swats at MAN 2.

ROSITA
Martha, head back to the kitchen.

MARTHA backs up toward the counter. ROSITA looks out the window and sees MYRTLE approaching.

ROSITA (cont.)
It's about time you boys got home.

MAN 1
Come on Rosie, don't punish me for his bad behavior.

MAN 2
Hey, what did I do?

ROSITA
Please.

They grumble lightheartedly and begin to pack up. ROSITA stands and stretches, before walking back toward MARTHA. She keeps an eye on MYRTLE through the window.

ROSITA
You've been scrubbing down my counter for hours, Martha. Soon I won't have one left.

MARTHA
I. . . just like to clean, that's all.

ROSITA
And brew, and cook, and take stock for me too. You haven't let me into my own kitchen all day.

MARTHA

Well, that is why you pay me, ma'am.

ROSITA

Ah, yes, how could I forget?

ROSITA steps behind the counter to open the cash register. MARTHA backs toward the kitchen. ROSITA counts out a small stack of bills.

ROSITA

Here's your pay this week. Don't let anyone say I'm robbing you now.

MARTHA

You're too generous, ma'am.

ROSITA shrugs, and MARTHA pockets the money. The remaining patrons put on their hats and head toward the door.

MAN 1

Bye, Rosie.

MAN 2

See you tomorrow.

ROSITA

Bye, boys.

MARTIN

I'll be back soon, if you'll have me.

ROSITA *(dismissively)*

Mhmm. Goodbye, Uncle.

They leave, passing MYRTLE in silence. After a beat, MYRTLE enters.

MYRTLE

I'm sorry. Rosita, right? Are you still open?

ROSITA

We actually just closed.

MYRTLE

Oh, perfect. I was just leaving the site, and I figured I'd come by and see if your owner was in.

ROSITA

Not today, ma'am.

MYRTLE

That's alright. *(Beat.)* You know, while I'm here, do you think I could maybe tour the property? Take a look at the kitchen, the bedroom. . .

ROSITA

A tour?

MYRTLE

Just to get a feel for the place.

ROSITA and MARTHA make uneasy eye contact.

ROSITA

Um, sure, I guess. . . why don't we start with the kitchen?

MARTHA

NO! I mean. . . I, uh, made a bit of a mess back there. I was going to clean it once you went upstairs.

ROSITA

I'm sure it's not that bad.

MARTHA

It really is. Why don't you two go upstairs while I mop it up?

ROSITA

You know, I haven't made my // bed, and. . .

MYRTLE

Ladies, if today's not a good day, just let me know. I can come back anytime, once you've got the place fit to see.

ROSITA

That would probably be for the best.

MYRTLE

Of course.

ROSITA inches out from behind the counter and walks toward the door, turning the sign from "Open" to "Closed." MYRTLE turns to MARTHA.

MYRTLE (cont.)

Have you given any thought to that audition?

MARTHA

I, uh. . . when is it, again?

MYRTLE

Tomorrow night.

Beat.

MARTHA

I'll be there.

ROSITA stares at MARTHA, but says nothing.

MYRTLE

Fabulous! Well, I guess I'll be going then. I'll see you in a few days. Don't forget to tidy up!

ROSITA holds open the door for MYRTLE, who exits. ROSITA locks the door behind her. MARTHA visibly exhales. ROSITA turns to her.

ROSITA

What is the matter with you? You've been jumping around all day. Myrtle probably thinks we're hiding something now.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, I really am. I—

From the back, a small sneeze is heard, followed by a shushing sound. MARTHA freezes.

ROSITA

What was that?

MARTHA

What was what?

ROSITA

Martha, you can tell me what that sound was or you can hand your pay back to me right now.

MARTHA doesn't say anything. ROSITA takes a step toward the kitchen, just as ELENA emerges. The following lines are simultaneous.

MARTHA

NO! Don't—

ELENA

AH! I'm so sorry, I—

ROSITA

AH! Who are you?

ROSITA grabs a coffee tin and brandishes it like a weapon. A tense, confused beat.

ROSITA (cont.)

I'll ask you again. Who are you, and what are you doing back there?

MARTHA steps between ROSITA and ELENA.

MARTHA

Her name is Elena.

ROSITA

Martha, you need to explain what's going on right now.

ELENA

Please, ma'am, allow me—

ROSITA

Martha. Please.

MARTHA

She, um. . . she showed up this morning, while you were upstairs. She didn't have anywhere else to go.

ROSITA

Is my restaurant a halfway house now? What were you thinking, putting her in my kitchen?

MARTHA

I'm so sorry ma'am, it was my mistake, I-

ELENA

Please. It is my fault. I-

ROSITA notices ELENA's accent, and takes a step back.

ROSITA

You're not from here.

ELENA

No, I-

ROSITA

I. . . I need you to leave my restaurant right now. I will not have police knocking down my store looking for illegal immigrants in my kitchen. *(To MARTHA.)* And you-

ELENA

I know Manuel. // Sort of.

ROSITA

Excuse me?

ELENA

A. . . a friend of a friend. This is his shop, yes?

ANNA and JOSEPH peek out from the kitchen, and then wrap themselves around ELENA's legs. ROSITA watches, speechless.

JOSEPH

Mama, are you okay?

ELENA

It's fine, Joseph. We should. . . I think we need to leave.

ANNA

But I thought we were going to stay here. You said it was safe.

ROSITA

Are these your children?

ELENA

Yes, ma'am.

Beat.

ROSITA

How did— how do you know Manuel?

ELENA

When we left home, a woman in our town mentioned that her brother moved across the ocean a few years ago, and that he helps people get to safety. We found him on the islands a few months later, and he told us about this place. He said Manuel was an old friend. (*Beat.*) Please. We have nowhere else to go.

ROSITA

That's all well and good, but Manuel isn't here. And I don't have the room or the money for three extra bodies, even if I did feel like breaking federal law. Myrtle could have heard you.

MARTHA

Ma'am, what about your store room, in the back of the kitchen?

ROSITA

Excuse me?

MARTHA

I don't mean to— I just. . . there's some space there, behind the shelves. Maybe they could stay, just for a little while?

ROSITA

This is my restaurant. You have no right to make those kinds of offers.

MYRTLE reappears outside, holding her mug from her first visit.

MYRTLE

I can't believe I forgot to give this back to. . .

She notices ELENA, JOSEPH, and ANNA through the window and watches silently. Inside, ROSITA, MARTHA, and ELENA continue uninterrupted.

ELENA

We'll be as quiet as mice. I swear it. We could even help you in the kitchen.

ROSITA

It's not like I can pay you. I can't even feed you. I don't know why // I'm even—

ELENA

We can get by, if we have a place to sleep. And it's only until we find a real place to live. *(Beat.)* I. . . I think the police may still be looking for us.

ROSITA

I can't believe this. I could be arrested for even talking to you. You can't be here.

MARTHA pulls the money ROSITA gave her from her pocket.

MARTHA

Here, ma'am. Take some of this back. I can't give much, but if // it makes it easier to. . .

ELENA

I can't ask you to do that.

ROSITA

Why are you helping them?

MARTHA pauses, looking at ELENA and her children.

MARTHA

I don't— I don't know. But you helped me, when I needed a job. I wanted to do the same.

ROSITA

You couldn't have chosen a more reckless way to do it.

MARTHA

I know, ma'am. I'm sorry. *(Beat.)* Please.

ROSITA begins pacing the restaurant. She glances out the window, but does not see MYRTLE. She then turns back to ELENA.

ROSITA

You can stay. For a few days. I'll— bring down an extra pillow and a blanket, but that's all I have. You can eat the bread that gets burnt, or anything left at the end of the day. Martha can bring you water when you need it. I really can't offer anything else.

ELENA flings her arms around ROSITA, and the children follow suit.

ELENA

That's perfect. Thank you. I really—

JOSEPH and ANNA (*in unison*)

Thank you!

ROSITA

You. . . you can't stay forever.

ELENA

Of course. I understand.

MARTHA (*beaming*)

Thank you, ma'am.

ROSITA

You should go home. Be here early tomorrow.

MARTHA

Yes, ma'am. Thank you, again.

MARTHA nods at them and unlocks the door to leave as ROSITA leads ELENA and her children off-stage. MYRTLE disappears just as MARTHA exits the café.

scene 4

A few days later. Lunch rush. A milkman walks through the front door carrying two full crates.

ROSITA

Ah, finally! We could have used you a few days ago, you know.

MILKMAN

Sorry, Rosie. You know how it is these days.

He sets the crates down on the counter.

MILKMAN (cont.)

Can I take these into the back for you?

ROSITA tenses for the briefest of moments.

ROSITA

Oh, don't worry about it. We. . . we have a leak. Trying to stay out of there as much as possible.

MILKMAN

I could check that out for you, if you want? You were my last delivery today, I've got time.

ROSITA

Oh, no, that's alright.

MILKMAN

Really, it's no trouble.

ROSITA

No, no, it's just— Martha's husband is a builder, he said he'd check it out tonight. But thank you.

MILKMAN

Of course.

ROSITA

Can I get you a sandwich?

MILKMAN

Sure thing. You know how I like it.

ROSITA

Coming right up.

ROSITA begins to call the order into the kitchen, just as MARTHA walks out with two full plates.

ROSITA (cont.)

Can I get one—

MARTHA

No need to yell, ma'am. I'm right here. It's just us.

MARTHA smiles, and they share a tense laugh. ROSITA picks up the milk crates and disappears into the back. MARTHA delivers her food to a nearby table.

MAN 1

Thank you, Martha.

MAN 2

Isaac's lucky to have you.

MARTHA

Does he talk about me?

MAN 1

He doesn't talk about much else. He's missed you at the site the past few lunches.

MARTHA

Oh, well, it's been awfully busy here. I just haven't had time to go over.

MAN 1

We can talk to Rosie for you, if you want, tell her to cut you some slack. We've known her for years. I'm sure she'll understand.

MAN 2

You've got to take care of your man.

MARTHA

Isaac's very capable of taking care of himself. And we both have work to do, he understands that.

MAN 2

Yeah, but some of the other guys miss you, too. It's nice having a woman around.

MARTHA

Alright, boys. I've got other tables to check on. Let me know if you need anything else, okay?

Just as MARTHA turns away from their table, ISAAC walks in the door.

MARTHA

Isaac! I didn't // expect—

MAN 1

Hey, Isaac! Come sit over here! We were just talking to your girl.

ISAAC

Can I talk to you?

MARTHA looks back at the kitchen, before taking ISAAC by the arm and gently leading him outside.

MARTHA

We can talk, here. But it has to be quick.

ISAAC

Did I do something wrong?

MARTHA

What do you mean?

ISAAC

You haven't come around for lunch the past few days. I've missed you.

MARTHA

You can always come here.

ISAAC

It's hard for me to get away at lunch, you know that.

MARTHA

It's hard for me too. But the other men seem to manage it.

Beat.

ISAAC

I'm sorry. I just feel like we never see each other anymore.

MARTHA

I'm sorry too. Rosita's been giving me. . . extra work. Plus, the rehearsals. . .

ISAAC

I wish you hadn't taken that dance job.

MARTHA

I know.

*MARTHA looks in the window and notices
ROSITA watching her.*

MARTHA (cont.)

I need to get back inside. Can you stay for a while?

ISAAC

Actually, we finished early at the site today. I can stay until your shift is over.

MARTHA smiles.

MARTHA

Are you hungry?

ISAAC

Starving.

*MARTHA and ISAAC enter the café. ISAAC sits
at an empty table. MARTHA brings him a mug
of coffee. Her hands are shaking.*

ISAAC (under his breath)

Martha, are you okay? Your hands, they're—

MARTHA

It's fine, Isaac. Can we talk later?

ISAAC hesitates, then nods. MARTHA kisses him on his forehead and heads back to the counter, where ROSITA is waiting.

ROSITA

He doesn't usually come around for lunch. Is something wrong?

MARTHA

No. He's just upset I haven't visited him in a while.

ROSITA

You spend every night with him. Isn't that enough?

MARTHA

That's not the point. He thinks I'm mad at him. Or avoiding him.

ROSITA

Well, is he staying for lunch?

MARTHA

At least. He said they finished early at the site today, he might just stay until we close.

ROSITA

Does he know about—

MARTHA

No. I haven't told him yet.

ROSITA

That's probably a good thing. Alright, finish up your tables, then you can take a break and eat with him if you'd like.

MARTHA

Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

*MARTHA begins wiping down a table as ROSITA vanishes into the kitchen, reappearing a moment later with a plate of cookies. She slides them into a display case on the counter, taking one for herself. She chews absentmindedly, looking around the café.
Beat.*

MYRTLE appears outside the café, wearing a frilly dress and a large hat and holding

her mug from before. ROSITA notices her outside the window and sprints out from behind the counter to meet her at the door.

ROSITA (*out of breath*)
Mrs. English! What a nice surprise.

MYRTLE
Well, hello there, Rosita. Is your owner—

ROSITA
No, he— you know, you just missed him. I told him about your offer, though.

MYRTLE
My offer?

ROSITA
To. . . buy the café? Turn it into “something else?” You wanted a tour, I thought—

MYRTLE
Oh, heavens no! Carl loves this place. He thinks it adds a real authentic vibe to the area. The tourists’ll just eat it up. My idea was really. . . well, it was just that. An idea.

ROSITA
Why don’t we step outside, and you can tell me all about it?

MYRTLE
Well, I really don’t know if you’re the right person to tell. No offense, I mean. The owner, he—

ROSITA
We’re really more like business partners. If you tell me about it, I can relay it back to him the next time he’s in.

MYRTLE purses her lips.

MYRTLE
Oh, alright. But before we talk, could I get something to drink? With ice, if you have it, it’s miserably hot out.

ROSITA
Oh, we generally don’t get ice shipped in. We just got fresh milk, though. It should still be cold.

MYRTLE

That's fine, then. I'll wait out here.

ROSITA takes her mug and hurries inside behind the counter. Inside, the café is silent. MARTHA brings ISAAC a sandwich.

ISAAC (whispering)

Is that who I think it is?

MARTHA nods.

ISAAC (cont.)

Does she come here a lot?

MARTHA shakes her head.

ISAAC

What's she doing here?

MARTHA shrugs. ISAAC looks as if he's about to ask another question, but MARTHA turns away before he can. He crosses his arms and watches ROSITA as she walks back outside to meet MYRTLE with two cold mugs of milk.

MYRTLE

You're a doll.

ROSITA carefully shuts the café door completely and then leans against the wall.

ROSITA

So, your idea. . .?

MYRTLE

Yes. Alright, well—

She takes a moment to look around, making sure that nobody is listening.

MYRTLE (cont.)

So Carl, my husband, he. . . well, he's like most men. He likes a good drink every now and then. (Beat.) Not milk, you understand.

ROSITA squints at her, not sure where she's going.

MYRTLE (cont.)

And these days, well, it's a lot *harder* to get a good drink. And he— well, he seems to think the guests over at the new hotel are also going to want something. . . refreshing, on their vacations.

ROSITA

Not milk?

MYRTLE

Not milk. Right.

ROSITA

Are you saying I should serve something else? Like. . . // sweet tea?

MYRTLE

Yes! Well, no. I mean, yes, something else. "Something else!"

ROSITA

I don't follow.

MYRTLE

Rosita, let's be frank. Do you serve alcohol here?

ROSITA drops her mug, and it shatters.

ROSITA

Shit! Oh, God. I'm so sorry. I don't know why— I mean. No. I— I don't. Of course not. It's illegal.

MYRTLE

Well, I know that!

ROSITA bends down to sweep up the broken glass.

MYRTLE (cont.)

What I'm saying, is. . . I think you should.

ROSITA

You think I should what?

MYRTLE

Serve. . . something else.

ROSITA

No. I couldn't— I'm sorry, ma'am. I can't do that.

MYRTLE

We could pay you. Our people would pay *really well* to get good drinks around here. And I'm sure it hasn't been easy to pay rent lately, what with this big land boom. We could help.

ROSITA

They could jail me. Or worse.

MYRTLE

I can take care of the police. They wouldn't bother you.

ROSITA

You don't know that.

MYRTLE

You know, most of them drink, too.

ROSITA

That's. . . it's way too dangerous. There's no way I could have someone smuggle in shipments of that. I wouldn't even know where to look for a supplier.

MYRTLE

I was actually thinking that maybe. . . well, you could make it. Here.

ROSITA

What?!

The two STATE OFFICERS from before walk by the café. Seeing ROSITA and MYRTLE together, they draw their batons. ROSITA freezes.

OFFICER 1

Ma'am, are you alright?

OFFICER 2

You shouldn't be here.

MYRTLE

Who, me? Please, I'm fine. I just stopped in for a drink, officers.

OFFICER 1

There's a white café close to here. You should have gone to that one.

MYRTLE

But officer, this one's closer to the resort, and the drinks are far better. You should try them some time, right Rosita?

ROSITA looks at the officers' feet and says nothing.

OFFICER 2

Fat chance. You sure you're not in danger? These people, ma'am, you can't trust 'em.

MYRTLE

I'm quite alright, officers. Have a nice day.

The officers look at each other for a moment, before sheathing their batons and walking off-stage. ROSITA begins to shake, and she sniffles quietly.

MYRTLE

Now, what are you going on about? Those officers are fine gentlemen, you know.

Beat. MYRTLE reaches into her purse and pulls out a handkerchief. She offers it to ROSITA, who sucks in a deep breath and steps back.

ROSITA

I- I'm sorry, I-

MYRTLE folds the handkerchief tightly.

MYRTLE

I know you're hiding something, Rosita.

ROSITA

I— Ma'am, I don't know what you're—

MYRTLE

A family. You've got them in your kitchen, I think. *(Beat.)* They don't belong here.

The color drains from ROSITA's face.

ROSITA *(quietly)*

I was just trying to. . . It's not my. . .

MYRTLE offers the handkerchief again, more firmly this time.

MYRTLE

Take this. You're making a fool out of yourself.

ROSITA takes the handkerchief but does not use it.

MYRTLE *(cont.)*

I don't have a problem with what you're doing. Really, I don't. But those fine gentlemen, I'm sure they would. Now, since you clearly don't mind breaking laws here and there, I actually think we can help each other out. If you do what I'm asking you, I'll be sure to not say anything to them. And, I'll personally pay your rent. Eight months, to start. How does that sound?

ROSITA

I don't know, I—

MYRTLE

Think carefully before you answer.

ROSITA fidgets with the handkerchief. A long beat.

ROSITA *(quietly)*

I can't. . .

MYRTLE takes in a deep breath and calls out at the top of her lungs.

MYRTLE

POLICE! HELP!

Some of the café patrons leap to their feet inside, concerned. The two STATE OFFICERS run back onstage, their batons drawn.

OFFICER 1

What is it, ma'am?

OFFICER 2 grabs ROSITA by the arm. She does not move.

OFFICER 2

Is there a problem here?

He prods ROSITA with his baton.

MYRTLE

Oh, no, it's nothing like that. I was just wondering if you could give me directions to that other café. I think I'd like to try it tomorrow.

The two OFFICERS make eye contact, before OFFICER 2 reluctantly lets go of ROSITA's arm and roughly pushes her away.

OFFICER 1

Certainly, ma'am. It's, uh—

OFFICER 2

Down Orange Avenue, across Cedar Street.

OFFICER 1

Yeah, that's it.

MYRTLE

Oh, of course. I must walk by that place every day, I can't believe I didn't notice it. Thank you so much!

OFFICER 2 *(eyeing ROSITA)*

Is that all?

MYRTLE

That's it. Thanks again boys!

OFFICER 1 *(under his breath)*

Dumb blonde.

The two OFFICERS grunt and walk away, looking back a few times at MYRTLE and ROSITA. The patrons sit down, but remain watching intently from inside the windows. MYRTLE turns back to ROSITA, smiling.

MYRTLE

So. Do we have an agreement?

Beat. ROSITA finally gives a small nod.

MYRTLE

Ah, wonderful! Let me know if you have any trouble getting the materials. Oh, and get one of those strong builder-types inside to help you set everything up. It's a lot for a woman to handle on her own.

Silently, ROSITA opens the door to the café. MYRTLE reaches out her mug of milk.

MYRTLE

Rosita.

ROSITA turns back to MYRTLE, avoiding eye contact, and takes the mug.

ROSITA

Yes. Of course. I'm sorry.

MYRTLE

I'll see you soon, then. And you can keep the handkerchief.

ROSITA nods. MYRTLE leaves, and ROSITA chokes back a sob. Everyone stares.

ROSITA

(Quietly.) Everyone out. *(Louder.)* I said, everyone out.

The patrons scramble out of their chairs, fishing change out of their pockets to leave on the tables. ISAAC stands but does not move to leave. Everyone else files out as MARTHA emerges from the kitchen. ROSITA sinks to the floor and begins to cry.

MARTHA

Ma'am, are you alright? What happened?

ISAAC

Martha. . . ?

MARTHA

Isaac, I think you should go home.

ISAAC

Not until I know what's going on.

MARTHA

Nothing's going on.

ROSITA snuffles, and wipes her nose on her apron.

ROSITA

Isaac, I have a favor to ask of you.

MARTHA and ISAAC make eye contact, confused.

ROSITA

Do you know how to build a. . . a still?

ISAAC

What? Like, for alcohol?

ROSITA nods. Isaac recoils.

ISAAC

No. No way.

MARTHA

Ma'am, I don't understand.

ROSITA

It's— it's the only way to keep the police off my back. Myrtle threatened. . . She said they'll buy liquor, or—

ISAAC

That makes no sense. They'd arrest you, wouldn't they?

ROSITA

Myrtle said she'd— They'll keep it quiet, keep it safe. . . And the rent. . .

ISAAC

I won't do it. I don't want any part of this. We're here to live honest lives, Martha.

ROSITA

Please. You and Martha can share the profits. Buy a home.

MARTHA

Ma'am, this is risky. Especially when we're already—

ROSITA stands.

ROSITA

That's enough. I'll. . . clear out the back shed tonight, and we can buy the materials later this week.

ISAAC

I said no.

ROSITA

Martha, please.

ISAAC

It's not her decision!

Beat.

MARTHA (*softly*)

Isaac. We need the money. You didn't even work a full day today.

ISAAC

Are you seriously on her side?

MARTHA

She's bent over backwards for me, Isaac. You have no idea. It's the least we could do. If she says it will help—

ISAAC

I can't believe this.

ROSITA

You'd- I'd give you half the money. And you wouldn't even need to run it. I just need your help to set it up. I don't have the right tools.

ISAAC

You're asking too much.

MARTHA

Isaac-

ISAAC

Stop defending her! This is insane! Why am I the only one that sees that? *(He turns to ROSITA. Beat.)* I seriously doubt the real owner of this place would appreciate-

ROSITA

He's dead.

Beat.

ISAAC

What? I-

MARTHA

You said he left.

ROSITA

He was murdered. They came and took him at night, beat him and left him for dead.

MARTHA

Oh, God.

ROSITA

He lived, though. Manuel was strong. But he had a hot temper. He saw one of the men in town later that month, and he. . . he shot at him. I didn't even know he had a gun. They arrested him, but by the time I found out and went to the jail to see him, he was gone. They left his body at my doorstep the next morning. I had to bury him myself, none of the cemeteries in town would take him. That was four years ago. *(Beat.)* The police, they've been circling me like vultures ever since.

MARTHA

Why? Why would they do that?

ROSITA

We were together. He was white. That was enough. *(Beat.)*
Eventually, I took over the restaurant and started serving the Cubans around here. Most of them never even knew Manuel. I don't think Myrtle knows, either, but it doesn't matter. She's got the police wrapped around her finger. If we do this for her, maybe they'll finally leave me alone. I don't think I have any other options.

ISAAC

I'm sorry, I. . . I didn't know. . .

ROSITA

I need your help now. Please.

ISAAC shakes his head and takes a step back.

MARTHA

Isaac.

MARTHA squares her shoulders, crosses over to ISAAC, and takes his hands.

MARTHA (cont.)

This is the right thing to do. *(Beat.)* Trust me.

A long, lingering beat. ISAAC finally nods.

End Act 1.

ACT TWO

scene 1

Just before sunrise, almost two months later. Newly-installed curtains are drawn across the windows, offering some privacy. ELENA sits at one of the tables, drinking coffee and watching JOSEPH and ANNA play with MARTHA. She is teaching them her dance from the resort opening.

MARTHA

And then, you swing your hands up like this, and shimmy your hips all the way down. . .

ANNA attempts it, but stumbles. They all laugh.

ELENA

You "shimmied" too hard, I think.

JOSEPH

You try, Mama!

ELENA

Oh, no.

ANNA

Come on, you can do it! Just like the theater!

ANNA takes ELENA by the hands and pulls her to her feet.

MARTHA

Swing your hands up, and then—

They all do the move, to varying degrees of success. More laughter. Some time during this moment, ROSITA comes down the stairs in her robe. She stands, watching them silently. JOSEPH is the first to notice.

JOSEPH

Miss Rosita! Come shimmy!

MARTHA and ELENA abruptly stop laughing and turn to face ROSITA.

MARTHA
I'm sorry, ma'am, we must have been too // loud—

ELENA
Please, forgive us—

Beat. ROSITA shimmies. JOSEPH and ANNA fall to the ground laughing.

ROSITA
You know, Martha, I can have fun too.

MARTHA (*smiling*)
Yes, ma'am. I know.

ROSITA makes her way behind the counter.

ROSITA
Is that from your dance? The "spectacular" whatever?

MARTHA
Yes, ma'am.

ROSITA
Well, it better be good. I expect you to give us a full performance here one night. I'll keep the café open late, we can make it a thing.

MARTHA
Oh, no, you shouldn't—

ROSITA
We've got more than enough liquor now. I'll keep some extra. And I'll pay you, obviously. Why not?

ANNA
Can we come?

ELENA
I don't think // so.

ROSITA

We'll see.

The children look excitedly at ELENA. Beat.

ROSITA (cont.)

Myrtle's coming by this morning. You'll have to hide upstairs. She doesn't know you're still here. I told her you moved on.

ELENA

Of course. Thank you. (Beat.) I know we've probably overstayed our welcome. It's been almost eight weeks.

ROSITA

Once the resort opening is over, I think the police will spend less time around here. I hope. We can find a way to move you out then, find you somewhere to live.

ELENA

Thank you.

ROSITA crosses to one of the windows and peeks out of the curtains. She goes back to the counter, pulls a few pieces of cake from the display case, and wraps them in a cloth. She hands them to JOSEPH and ANNA.

ROSITA

Here. It's not much, but they're lemon flavored. The men really liked them yesterday. Just try not to get crumbs on my bed.

JOSEPH and ANNA (in unison)

Thank you, Miss Rosita!

ROSITA

Alright, head upstairs. Don't forget to save some for your mom, now.

JOSEPH and ANNA nod vigorously and make their way up the stairs. MARTHA begins sweeping the floor as ROSITA wipes down the counter and ELENA takes down the remaining chairs.

ELENA

You're good with children, Martha.

MARTHA

Thank you.

ELENA

Do you have any?

MARTHA

No. I mean, not yet.

ELENA

You would be a wonderful mother. Don't you think so, Miss Rosita? *(Beat.)* Did you ever. . .?

ROSITA

No. I thought Manuel and I might, but. . . Anyways, I helped my sister raise her four kids, back home. That was enough for me.

ELENA

I'm sorry. I didn't mean. . . Do you still talk to your sister?

ROSITA

No.

Beat.

ELENA

I left my sister back home, too.

MARTHA

What was your home like?

ELENA

Chaos. The government was in shambles. We were about to be sent away, when we left.

MARTHA

Sent where?

ELENA

Nobody knows. I never saw anybody come back, though. *(Beat.)* It used to be so beautiful there, before. I try to tell Joseph and Anna stories about the good parts. That's what I want them to remember.

ROSITA

What did you do, when you lived there?

ELENA (*smiling*)

I made the costumes for a local theatre. And other odd jobs, a lot of tailoring. But the costumes were my favorite.

MARTHA

You should see what they're having me wear for this dance. It's practically nothing. It's all sequins and legs.

ROSITA

I'm sure the men are happy about that.

They all laugh.

MYRTLE appears outside, wearing an oversized coat and hat. She knocks on the door three times. ROSITA looks at MARTHA and nods, before going to unlock the door. ELENA climbs the stairs and MARTHA disappears into the kitchen as MYRTLE enters. She takes off her hat and shakes her hair out.

MYRTLE (*loudly*)

Oh, Rosita! I swear, I felt so silly standing out there like that. We really need to figure out a better system.

ROSITA

Yes, ma'am.

MYRTLE

How is everything going? I hope you've got what you promised me.

ROSITA

Yes, ma'am. I have about twelve bottles now, and I should have another six by next week.

MYRTLE

Oh, wonderful!

ROSITA

It's a little. . . harsh, in flavor, but I think you could mix it with something else to hide it. Ideally, we would age it, // but—

MYRTLE

Oh, there's no time for that. Can I see it?

MARTHA emerges from the kitchen, carrying a milk crate full of clear bottles. MYRTLE takes one and holds it up to the light, before opening it to sniff.

MYRTLE

Whew! You weren't kidding.

She takes a sip directly from the bottle and almost gags.

MYRTLE (cont.)

Yeah, that'll do. Wow. And you said twenty four bottles total?

ROSITA

Eighteen, I think. . . Our still is small, and it needs to ferment for a few days before—

MYRTLE

Can we make it thirty?

ROSITA

Ma'am, I'm not sure—

MYRTLE

Carl's got two hundred people coming to this opening. What are we supposed to do, serve them in thimbles? Don't hold out on me, Rosita.

ROSITA grits her teeth.

MYRTLE (cont.)

If you get me thirty of these by next Friday, I'll make sure you get your six month's rent. How's that?

ROSITA

Last time, you said eight.

MYRTLE

Last time, I didn't know you weren't even going to give me enough rum to fill my bathtub. I'm being generous here. *(Beat.)* No matter. Martha, right? Can you carry this to the resort for me sometime this morning? It's not that far, I'm sure you know, but I *just* got my fingernails painted. How novel is that?

MARTHA

I— the police—

MYRTLE

Won't bother you one bit. I talked to them yesterday. Just say you're dropping off tonics for Mr. English.

MARTHA looks to ROSITA for approval. ROSITA nods reluctantly.

MARTHA

Yes, ma'am.

MYRTLE

Wonderful! I guess I'll be going, then. Unless you want to send me off with another coffee. . .?

ROSITA nods again, and MARTHA begins to brew the coffee.

MYRTLE

You two are so good to me.

ROSITA smiles politely and nods, handing her the drink. MYRTLE heads toward the door.

MARTHA

Ma'am. Your hat.

MYRTLE

Ah, yes. Thank you, Martha.

MYRTLE tucks her hair back into her hat.

MYRTLE (cont.)

And do hurry with that delivery!

MARTHA

Yes, ma'am.

MYRTLE leaves, and ROSITA locks the door behind her. After a few long breaths, ROSITA crosses to the stairs.

ROSITA

(Quietly, to MARTHA.) What a horrible woman. *(Louder, to upstairs.)* You all can come down now.

scene 2

The café a few days later, mid-day and bustling. MARTIN sits on one of the tables, reading aloud from his journal to an enraptured group. ROSITA, whistling, comes out from the kitchen with a tray of coffees and begins serving them to the patrons around MARTIN.

MARTIN

" . . . Freedom does not allow for compromise. One cannot be half free, like one cannot be half enslaved." *(The men cheer.)* You see—

MAN 1

That's good. Who wrote that?

MARTIN

I did.

MAN 2

Yeah, right.

MARTIN

No, really, I—

MAN 1

Oh, thank you, Rosie. You know just what I need on days like this.

MAN 2

Yeah, your new "special" is really something.

MAN 1

It's—

ROSITA

Liquid sunshine, boys. Enjoy. And don't forget about the show tomorrow!

MAN 2

Wouldn't miss it.

MARTIN

Show?

MAN 1

You haven't heard?

MAN 2

Martha's gonna give us a little dance.

ROSITA

It's not just that. The resort is having its big opening at the same time, so we're celebrating too. Besides, the police will be too busy getting drunk over there to bother us.

MARTIN

Drunk on what?

The men raise their mugs.

MAN 1

Liquid sunshine!

MARTIN looks at ROSITA. Beat.

MARTIN

Are you. . .? Rosita. You're not that stupid.

MAN 2

Loosen up, old man. Have a drink.

MARTIN

You're serving alcohol here?

ROSITA

I'm adapting to the times. You should too.

MARTIN

It's times like these that people like us are killed for crimes like this.

ROSITA

It's safe. I have a system.

MARTIN

With who? The police? They're not your friends, Rosita. You can't "work something out" with them. They hate us, remember?

ROSITA (*quietly*)

I know that, Uncle.

MAN 1

Lay off her, Martin.

MARTIN

And you, you all knew about this? Am I the only one that didn't?
Am I the village idiot now?

ROSITA

No. *(Beat.)* Just the village lector.

The men howl with laughter.

MARTIN

Can I get back to speaking, already?

ROSITA sighs.

ROSITA

I obviously haven't been able to stop you yet. What's today's topic?

MAN 1

Slavery, I think?

MARTIN

Freedom.

ROSITA

Hm. Well, don't rile them up too much. Lunch is almost over, they'll have to head back soon.

MAN 2

You know, he's got some good things to say.

ROSITA

I'm sure you think so. *(To MARTIN.)* Would you like something to drink?

MARTIN

Yes. Please. With no surprises.

ROSITA

One regular café con leche coming up. *(Beat.)* And Uncle, you're welcome to come to the show. I'd be. . . glad to have you.

MARTIN opens his journal and almost begins speaking to the crowd again, but at that moment MARTHA steps through the door in a short, sequined dress and headband. The men immediately whistle and jeer. MARTHA purses her lips and stands straighter, but does not move from the doorway.

ROSITA

Martha! Where have you been? It's past noon and I've been dealing with these boneheads by myself all morning.

MAN 1

Hey, who are you calling a bonehead?

MARTHA

I'm sorry, ma'am. We had our final dress rehearsal today.

ROSITA

Ah, yes. Alright. Go change your clothes.

MAN 2

Oh, honey, you don't have to change. That's just fine.

ROSITA

One more comment like that and I'm throwing you out. Show her some respect.

MAN 2

Fine, okay, okay. She just looks nice, is all.

MARTHA lowers her head and slips into the kitchen.

MARTIN

Rosita, really, is this a café or a circus?

ROSITA

Mind your own business, Uncle. At least she has a job.

MARTIN

Hell, Rosita, how long until someone lights a match and this whole building goes up in flames?

Beat. MARTHA dashes out of the kitchen, still in her dress, and whispers something to ROSITA. They both hurry back into the kitchen.

MAN 1

What's going on? Is something burning?

MARTIN

I really wasn't trying to be literal.

ROSITA rushes out of the kitchen and around the café, closing all of the curtains over the windows. The café gets very dark.

MAN 2

What the hell?

ROSITA

Don't. . . don't worry. I just—

MARTIN

Rosita?

MARTHA walks out of the kitchen, ELENA draped over her shoulder. ELENA is unconscious.

MAN 2

Who's that?

MAN 1

Is she okay?

ROSITA

Her— her name is Elena. She was Manuel's friend, or— or something like that. She's not well.

MARTHA sets ELENA down at an empty chair and fetches a wet rag for her forehead.

MAN 2

What was she doing back there?

ROSITA

She's been— for a while—

JOSEPH and ANNA run out of the kitchen towards their mom, but freeze when they see a café full of patrons. Beat.

JOSEPH

Miss Rosita, is Mama gonna be okay?

MAN 1

Okay, now I'm really confused.

ROSITA

Everybody, just— they've been staying here, with me. They're friends. They're. . .

MARTIN

Polish. Right?

The patrons look at each other in fear.

MARTIN (cont.)

Really, Rosita, which laws haven't you been breaking lately?

ROSITA

That's not the point. She's sick. She fainted back there, and we don't know why. Now, if you're not going to help, I suggest you shut up.

ANNA and JOSEPH walk over to ELENA and take her hands.

MARTHA

Can you tell me what happened?

ANNA

She was just sitting back there, telling us a story, and then she fell over.

MARTHA

Did she hit her head?

ANNA

I don't know. It's dark back there.

MARTHA feels around the back of ELENA's head. She finds some blood.

MARTHA

I'll go get another rag. Keep holding her hands.

JOSEPH

I'm scared.

ANNA

She'll be okay, Joseph.

MARTIN

I don't like this, Rosita. These people, they're. . .

MAN 2

I don't trust them.

MAN 1

I mean, they look pretty harmless to me. Seems like a weird secret to keep for so long, though.

ROSITA

They're just people. Immigrants, like us.

MARTIN

They're not like us. We came over the right way. They're. . . illegal.

ANNA opens her mouth to speak, but stops herself.

ROSITA

Their country is falling apart. It wasn't safe for them anymore. Isn't that why we came, to find a better life here?

MAN 1

I came for a job.

MAN 2

Yeah, and nobody's going to hire her. Not if she has an accent like the kids do.

ROSITA

Don't you realize that they say the same things about us? We're illegal, we're dangerous, we can't be trusted. They don't even see us as people. And Uncle, you want to talk about freedom, but

only for people like you. You had no issue with Martha, or me, or anyone else in this room. Elena should be no different.

ELENA stirs. She takes a moment to look around, before clutching MARTHA's hand.

ELENA

What's happening? Where—

MARTHA

You're still in the café. It's safe.

ROSITA (*pointedly*)

You can trust these men. They won't say anything if they know what's good for them.

The patrons avoid ROSITA's eye contact. ROSITA goes behind the counter to get ELENA a glass of water and some bread.

JOSEPH

Mama, are you okay?

ELENA

I. . . I think so. . . Rosita, I—

ROSITA

It's alright. Eat this.

ELENA

I'm sorry.

ROSITA

You have nothing to apologize for. (*Beat.*) Let's get you upstairs and into my bed. You probably just need some rest.

ELENA nods and attempts to stand. She leans heavily on MARTHA.

ROSITA (*cont.*)

You two follow, make sure she gets into bed okay.

ELENA, MARTHA, JOSEPH, and ANNA head upstairs.

MAN 1

Rosie, I—

MAN 2

You know, I didn't mean—

ROSITA sinks down into ELENA's chair.

ROSITA

Please. Don't. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. I've been putting you all in danger, and you didn't even know. It's been weighing on me for months. I can't even—

ROSITA takes a deep, shaky breath. MARTIN stands, walks over to ROSITA, and takes her hand.

MARTIN

You have a big heart, Rosie. It's going to get you in trouble someday.

scene 3

The night of the celebration. The windows are open to let in the evening breeze, and a warm light spills out from the packed café alongside riotous laughter and thick clouds of cigar smoke.

Inside, the chairs have been rearranged to form a small performance space in front of the stairs. ROSITA, wearing a simple dress and shawl with her hair softly curled, weaves deftly between the rows taking drink orders and laughing with the patrons. Except for ISAAC, the men are already in various states of intoxication.

MARTIN sits on a stool to the side of the performance space, strumming a Cuban tres guitar and leading the men in the final chorus of an upbeat song. When the song ends, they cheer.

MAN 1

Another!

MARTIN

That's all I've got.

The men boo lightheartedly. From offstage, the sound of a live band playing "The Charleston" drifts in.

MAN 2

Oh, please play something else. Drown them out. I can't listen to them butcher that across the street.

ELENA sticks her head out of the kitchen, as if to ask ROSITA a question.

MAN 1

Hey, Elena, right?

ELENA looks at him and says nothing.

MAN 1

Come out here, take a load off.

ELENA

No, I shouldn't, we—

As if on cue, JOSEPH and ANNA run out of the kitchen and into the dance space. MARTIN strums his guitar once or twice, and the children twirl around.

ELENA

Joseph, Anna, you shouldn't—

JOSEPH and ANNA (*in unison*)

Please, mama?

ANNA

Martha taught us and everything.

ROSITA

Elena, please, come sit out here. It's safe, the police won't bother us tonight.

ELENA hesitates, but finally nods and emerges from the kitchen. One of the men stands and offers her his seat.

ELENA

Thank you.

MAN 1 (*to MARTIN*)

What about that new one, from the radio? "Guantanamera?"

MARTIN

You know, I prefer the classics.

MAN 2

Come on, Martin, it's a good song.

MARTIN

First the radio takes my job as lector, now it takes my music from me too?

ROSITA

Humor them, Uncle.

Beat. "The Charleston" gets a bit louder.

MARTIN (*uncomfortably*)
I don't remember how it goes.

MAN 1
We'll help.

*A few of the men begin to sing
"Guantanamera" a capella. The version by
Joseíto Fernández is a good reference for
the first chorus and verse.*

MEN
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera. . .

MARTIN nods and begins to strum along.

MEN (*cont.*)
Yo soy un hombre sincero [I am an honest man]
De donde crecen las palmas [Where the palms grow]
Yo soy un hombre sincero [I am an honest man]
De donde crecen las palmas [Where the palms grow]
Y antes de morir yo quiero [And before I die I want]
Cantar mis versos del alma [To sing my verses of the soul]

*Everyone joins in for the chorus. "The
Charleston" gets louder, competing for
attention.*

ALL
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera

MEN (*boisterously*)
Mi verso es de un verde claro [My verse is light green]
Y de un carmín encendido [And flaming crimson]
Mi verso es de un verde claro [My verse is light green]
Y de un carmín encendido [And flaming crimson]
Mi verso es un ciervo herido [My verse is a wounded deer]
Que busca en el monte amparo [Seeking refuge on the mountain]

ALL

Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera

MARTIN

Alright, I think I remember this part.

The men cheer. MARTIN sings the final verse by himself. "The Charleston" fades away.

MARTIN

Con los pobres de la tierra [With the poor people of the earth]
Quiero yo mi suerte echar [I want to share my fate]
Con los pobres de la tierra [With the poor people of the earth]
Quiero yo mi suerte echar [I want to share my fate]
El arroyo de la sierra [The streams of the mountain]
Me complace más que el mar [Pleases me more than the sea]

ALL (*with finality*)

Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera
Guantanamera
Guajira guantanamera

As the song ends, the café erupts into applause. MARTIN smiles.

MARTHA appears outside the café, wearing her resort costume. She is missing a shoe, and the hem of her dress has started to tear. Makeup is streaked down her cheek.

ROSITA, slightly tipsy, sees MARTHA through the window and opens the door.

ROSITA

Martha? Is that you?

MARTHA (*quietly*)

Yes, ma'am.

ROSITA closes the door behind her and walks up to MARTHA.

ROSITA (*gently*)

What happened to you?

MARTHA

They. . . they said we were just going to perform, and then we could leave. But the men, they wanted the girls to stay and serve them drinks. (*Bitterly.*) There was plenty to go around, you made sure of that. The men, they had too much, and their hands. . . They told us we weren't allowed to say no. They said they'd send us back home. I saw some of the police there.

ROSITA takes her shawl off and wraps it around MARTHA.

MARTHA (*cont.*)

I- I don't want Isaac to see me like this.

ROSITA

Then he won't. Come inside, you can go directly upstairs. I have a change of clothes you can wear.

A loud noise comes from inside the café, possibly a bottle breaking. The men cheer. MARTHA flinches.

MARTHA

I- I can't. Not when they're like this. Like that.

ROSITA

Just close your eyes. I'll cover for you.

ROSITA holds MARTHA, and they take a few deep breaths together. Then, ROSITA takes MARTHA's hand and leads her into the café. The men immediately notice.

MAN 2

Hey, there she is!

MAN 1

The girl of the hour!

They cheer. ROSITA muscles her way through the crowd, MARTHA following close behind. Once they reach the stairs, MARTHA dashes

up and off, while ROSITA blocks the bottom of the stairway. ISAAC sees MARTHA and tries unsuccessfully to push forward through the throng of men.

MAN 2

Rosie, where's she going?

MAN 1

Yeah, don't tell me we have to listen to this old man sing again.

MAN 2

We want to see her dance!

ROSITA

Boys, boys, it's getting late. Why don't you head home? We'll do this some other night.

MAN 2

What the hell?

MAN 1

Yeah, Rosie, what's wrong?

MAN 2

You promised us.

ROSITA

She's sick.

MAN 1

Oh, I bet it's just a little stage fright.

MAN 2

Give her a drink, she'll be dancing on tables in no time.

ROSITA

I'm closing the café. You all need to go home.

MAN 2

What if we don't? This is our home too, Rosie.

The men cheer.

ISAAC (*over the crowd*)

Rosita!

MARTIN pulls ROSITA aside.

MARTIN

Rosie, this isn't a good idea.

ROSITA

It's my café. I get to choose when it closes.

MARTIN

Yes, but the men— you can't just throw them out on the street like this. Not tonight.

ROSITA

Well, I can't have them in here either. They're out of control.

MARTIN

Listen to me. They're getting. . . restless. You need to let them // cool down.

ROSITA

And whose fault is that?

ISAAC (still struggling)

Rosita!

MARTIN

You're the one serving them alcohol.

ROSITA

You've been feeding them fantasies for weeks! You must have known *this* was going to happen.

MARTIN

What exactly is "this?"

ROSITA

They're not listening. They think they're invincible now. They're so busy asserting their "freedom" that they're threatening everything I've built here. I can't have them like this, not here, not tonight. Uncle, please, talk some sense into them.

MARTIN

You need to give me time.

ROSITA

You have five minutes.

They stare at each other for a tense beat, before MARTIN climbs up on a stool to speak to the men.

MAN 2

Oh, is he going to dance for us now? Rosie, is that the best you've got?

MAN 1

Come on, you can do better than that. Where's Martha?

The men jeer.

MARTIN

Men, listen—

MAN 1

Oh, not another lecture! We want a dance!

MAN 2

Dance! Dance! Dance!

More men join the chant. MARTIN attempts to speak over them. ELENA holds JOSEPH and ANNA tightly to her as the men get more and more rowdy.

MARTIN

Rosita was kind enough to open her doors for us, and now it's time for us to return the favor and leave peacefully. We can all come back tomorrow. . .

Outside the café, the two STATE OFFICERS stumble drunkenly along, arm-in-arm. Upon hearing the commotion inside, they stop and draw their batons.

Seeing them in the window, ELENA freezes. She tries in vain to get ROSITA's attention, but ISAAC reaches her first.

ISAAC

Rosita.

ROSITA

Isaac.

ISAAC

Let me upstairs.

ROSITA

No.

ISAAC

I need to see my wife.

ROSITA

She'll come down when she's ready.

ISAAC

What's going on?

ROSITA

She's. . . freshening up.

ISAAC

I don't believe you. Let me see her.

MARTHA descends the stairs behind ROSITA, wearing a simple shirt and skirt. Bruises are forming on her eye, neck, and arms. ISAAC pushes past ROSITA to get to her.

MARTHA

Isaac. . .

ISAAC

Martha. What— who did this to you?

MARTHA

Isaac, please. I'm okay.

ISAAC

Clearly you're not. Did this happen tonight? At the opening?

MAN 1

Hey, is that Martha?

MAN 2

Where's her dress?

MAN 1

What happened to her?

MARTHA

Isaac, you can't. . .

MARTIN

Men, please, you'll see her another day. Now, if we can all just. . .

MAN 1

Somebody hit her!

MAN 2

Isaac, who's been touching your girl?

ISAAC, filled with rage, pushes MARTIN off the stool and steps onto it himself.

MARTIN

Hey, what the—

ISAAC

Those men across the street laid hands on my wife.

MARTHA

Isaac, don't!

ISAAC

Those are the same men that harass us each and every day.

The men boo.

ISAAC (cont.)

That work us to death.

The men boo louder.

ISAAC (cont.)

That pay us whatever they feel like, whenever they feel like it.

The men roar.

ISAAC (cont.)

That treat us as inferior, not even people!

The men exclaim.

MAN 1

Yeah!

MAN 2

They do!

ROSITA

Uncle, please, stop him!

MARTIN

I can't. It's too late.

ISAAC (cont.)

No longer! I say we march over there and show them who's inferior after all.

The men cheer. At that moment, the STATE OFFICERS burst through the door. Chaos ensues.

ELENA, JOSEPH, and ANNA run straight for the kitchen. MARTHA pulls ISAAC off the stool and starts upstairs, but he breaks free of her and surges toward the OFFICERS. The café patrons begin to land blows on the OFFICERS, who strike back with their batons. MARTIN forces his way through the crowd until he is face to face with the OFFICERS. He grabs one of their batons and attempts to take it.

MARTIN

Stop! Men! This violence will not bring you your freedom!

ISAAC

Get them!

The other OFFICER strikes MARTIN on the head, hard. He slumps to the ground.

ROSITA

UNCLE!

The fighting continues around MARTIN's unconscious body.

MYRTLE, wearing a flashy, short dress and carrying her high heels beside her, appears outside the café. She is very drunk.

MYRTLE

He-ey, what's going on in there?

MYRTLE walks up to the door and stands in the entryway, watching the fight. Her and ROSITA make eye contact for a brief moment.

MYRTLE (cont.)

Boys, cut it out!

The police, hearing her voice, stop for a moment.

MYRTLE (cont.)

We had a deal!

ISAAC

This is all her fault! Kill that bitch!

ISAAC lunges for MYRTLE. A gunshot echoes through the café. ISAAC falls to his knees. One of the officers is now brandishing his gun above the crowd. The patrons quickly run out of the café and away, leaving ROSITA, MYRTLE, ISAAC, an unconscious MARTIN, and the two OFFICERS on-stage.

MYRTLE (weakly)

I'm sorry, Rosita. I was. . . just trying to help. . .

MYRTLE collapses. A pool of blood forms around her. ISAAC, unharmed, backs away toward ROSITA. He points at MYRTLE's bleeding body and speaks to the OFFICERS.

ISAAC (breathing heavily)

This is your fault.

The OFFICERS make eye contact with each other and run out of the café in the opposite direction.

ELENA, JOSEPH, and ANNA emerge from the kitchen holding hands just as MARTHA comes downstairs. ISAAC moves toward MARTHA, but she steps away.

ISAAC

Martha.

MARTHA

Why? Why did you. . .

ISAAC

I. . . I don't know. . .

ROSITA rushes over to MARTIN.

ROSITA

Uncle. Uncle, wake up.

She begins to cry.

ROSITA (cont.)

Please. Uncle.

MYRTLE's hand twitches. ELENA lets go of JOSEPH and ANNA and sits down by MYRTLE.

MYRTLE

Who—

ELENA

Shh. It's okay. You're safe now.

ELENA takes MYRTLE's hand firmly. MARTHA wets a rag and brings it over to ELENA, but ELENA waves it away.

ELENA

That's not what she needs now.

MARTHA sits beside them.

ISAAC

Martha, we should leave. It's not safe.

MARTHA

I'm tired of running, Isaac. I'm tired of fighting. Can't we just stay?

ROSITA

Uncle, stay with me. Please.

MYRTLE

Stay. . .

ISAAC hesitates. Then, he sits. JOSEPH and ANNA sit by ELENA and begin to braid MYRTLE's hair. Together, they form a complete circle on the floor of the café. For a long moment, nobody speaks.

ISAAC

What do we do now?

MARTHA

Elena. Tell us a story.

ELENA

I don't. . .

JOSEPH

Our story, Mama.

ROSITA looks up from MARTIN.

ELENA

That's a sad story, Joseph.

ANNA

No it's not, Mama. Not when we're together.

ELENA

Are you sure?

Beat. Everyone nods. The lights begin to fade as ELENA speaks.

ELENA (cont.)

Well, like many stories, it begins on a boat. It's nighttime, and dark fog rolls endlessly over the waves. Just when you think it couldn't possibly get any darker, a bright green light begins to burn through the mist, and a sweet tune carries across the water. . .

*The ballad from the Prologue plays again.
Blackout.*

INFLUENTIAL WORKS

Cox, Nicole C. "Selling Seduction: Women and Feminine Nature in 1920s Florida Advertising." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2010, pp. 186-209. *JSTOR*.

Cruz, Nilo. *Anna in the Tropics*. Theatre Communications Group, 2003.

Dorr, Lisa Lindquist. "Bootlegging Aliens: Unsanctioned Immigration and the Underground Economy of Smuggling from Cuba during Prohibition." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 93, no. 1, 2014, pp. 44-73. *JSTOR*.

Gomez, Andrew. "Jim Crow and the Caribbean South: Cubans and Race in South Florida, 1885-1930s." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 36, no. 4, Summer 2017, pp. 25-48. *EBSCOhost*.

Herd, Denise A. "Prohibition, Racism and Class Politics in the Post-Reconstruction South." *Journal of Drug Issues*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1983, pp. 77-94. *ProQuest*.

Murphy, Mary. "Bootlegging Mothers and Drinking Daughters: Gender and Prohibition in Butte, Montana." *American Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1994, p. 174. *JSTOR*.

Ruhl, Sarah. *In the Next Room, or the Vibrator Play*. Theatre Communications Group, 2011.

Shell-Weiss, Melanie. "Coming North to the South: Migration, Labor and City-Building in Twentieth-Century Miami." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2005, pp. 79-99. *JSTOR*.

Suniland. Various issues, 1924-1928. *USF Digital Collections*.